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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to analyze interview and questionnaire responses from 50 liberal arts colleges receiving Exxon Foundation grants to improve their management. In this analysis it was learned that although respondents had opportunities to mention minorities they seldom did. Responses of five top college officials are analyzed here: campus president, chief student affairs officer, chief academic officer, chief fiscal officer, and development officer. Among the questions to which minority-related responses were anticipated were those about: highlights of the individual's administrative career, major disappointments in the career or position, difficult decisions, opinions of colleagues, colleagues on whom the individual relied, and outside formal lines of authority. Of the 909 possible responses concerning minorities, one percent referred directly to these minorities. It is suggested that the reason for this is that the first questions were management-related, and respondents may have had a difficult time "shifting gears" to open-ended questions. (MSE)

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"ETHNIC MINORITIES AT AMERICA'S LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES -- THE NEW INVISIBLE MEN AND WOMEN?"

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Before getting to the heart of my paper, I want to tell you briefly how the study on which it is based came about. From 1972 to 1977, the Exxon Education Foundation made grants to 50 liberal arts colleges for the purpose of improving their management. Shortly after the grant program began, that Foundation invited the Higher Education Research Institute of Los Angeles (hereafter called HERI) to study those campuses which had received grants and to analyze what changes, if any, the grants had made in their management. Accordingly, HERI researchers, under the leadership of HERI President Alexander W. Astin, visited 47 of the campuses, where they interviewed administrators, faculty and students and collected extensive questionnaire data from each of these groups.

Although all 50 colleges which received Exxon grants were private institutions, they varied widely in most other respects. As Astin and Rita Scherrei write in their forthcoming book on the study, tentatively titled, Managing Colleges for Maximum Effectiveness.

> "The median enrollment size was between 1,500 and 2,000 students, with a range from 250 to 10,000. The mean selectivity scores (mean SAT verbal plus mathematical score of entering freshmen) were 1,000 to 1,074, with a high of above 1,300 and a low of less than 775. Six of the institutions were Roman Catholic, fifteen were affiliated with a Protestant denomination, and twenty-six were nonsectarian. With the exception of four universities and four technological institutions, the sample consisted of liberal arts colleges. It also

> included five prodominantly black institutions. All geographic regions were covered: nineteen were located in the Northeast, six in the South, fourteen in the midwest, and eight in the Far West and the Southwest.[1]

My own role in the study was to analyze the responses administrators made to the questions that HERI researchers asked them in open-ended interviews. These questions ranged over a wide variety of subjects, with the respondents being questioned about their particular jobs, the role of their office in the college, the management of the college and the college's major accomplishments and problems. As I analyzed these interviews, one thing that struck me was how very seldom any of the administrators referred, in any way, to the presence of ethnic minority students and programs on their campuses. Though they were not asked directly, at any point, to discuss the situation of minority groups on their campuses, they were asked at least 25 different questions about life at their institutions -- questions to which they had ample opportunity to respond, if they wished, with comments about the role of minority students, faculty and administrators, and ethnic studies courses on their campuses. And yet -- a careful content analysis of the interviews reveals -- they very seldom availed themselves of this opportunity.

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[1]Alexander W. Astin and Rita A. Sherrei, Managing Colleges for Maximum Effectiveness, forthcoming.

Some of the colleges studied, of course, were schools with few minority students and programs, in sections of the United States far from any major ethnic population. Other schools, however, during the mid-1970s when their campuses were visited, had large and increasing ethnic enrollments and were located in cities, including big cities in the West, South and Northeast, with large numbers of ethnic minorities. That administrators at these colleges, in wide-ranging, open-ended interviews, very seldom mentioned the presence of ethnic minorities on their campuses in any way is particularly surprising and disappointing.

Although many different ranks of administrator were interviewed, ranging from the presidents of these colleges to their registrars, admissions officers, financial aid officers and other middle managers, in this paper the responses to five top officers are discussed. These five are the campuses' president, chief student affairs officer, chief academic officer, chief fiscal officer and development officer. Though each of them was asked many questions which would not normally elicit a response concerning his or her campus' ethnic minorities -- for example, "How would you characterize your college president's style of operation?" and "What information do you get now that you don't really need?". other, broader questions were asked to which the officer might easily respond with comments about the presence and role of ethnic minorities on campus. For these five top administrative officers, then, we will now discuss briefly how often they availed themselves of this opportunity.

Starting at the top, the presidents were asked, " What do you consider one of the highlights of your presidency so far at this college?" Forty-four presidents replied (at the other six schools, the president was not available for an interview). These 44 presidents cited 111 highlights (many naming two, three or more) of which exactly three (3%) dealt explicitly with the presence on campus of ethnic minorities. The president of a small, elite college in New England spoke of the "establishment of an Afro-American Studies Institute," the head of a black college in Texas said a highlight was having the opportunity to serve as a role model for ghetto youth, and the head of a technical institute in the Middle States mentioned establishing programs for minority students. None of the other 108 responses referred to monority students or programs.

Asked, "What has been one of your major disappointments?" 43 presidents cited 86 disappointments, of which only two (2%) directly involved ethnic monorities. The head of a college in South Carolina said his faculty does not give enough time and attention to minority students, and the president of the black college in Texas cited just above said that his main disappointment is that, though he aspires to be a role model, most of the black students at his school don't accept him as such.

Turning now to the chief student affairs officers, they were asked, "What are the toughest décisions you have to make....?

Forty-eight of them gave 62 responses, of which exactly two responses (3%) involved ethnic minorities; one said that his toughest decisions involved ethnic minority groups, the other said that his often involved foreign students, many of who may well have been ethnic minorities. Asked, "Do you have certain associates whose opinions you particularly value?", 23 chief student affairs officers cited 48 such associates by title, none of who appeared to be, judging from his or her title, primarily involved in administering or teaching in ethnic studies programs. Next, the chief student affairs officers were asked, "Do yor ever rely on the opinions of people who are outside the formal lines of authority at the college?" Forty-eight of them gave the titles of 108 persons or groups of persons, of which precisely one (1%) could be directly identified with minority groups.

The other officers under study here -- the chief academic affairs officer, the chief fiscal officer, and the development officer -- were asked the same three questions about their toughest decisions, the associates whose opinions they particularly valued, and whom they relied on outside the formal lines of authority at their college. To these questions they made more than 500 responses (many respondents, of course, making several responses to each question), and of these 500+ responses, not a <u>single</u> one referred directly to the minority presence on

campus.

All in all, the five top administrators analyzed here made 909 responses to questions which might well have elicited comments about ethnic minorities on their campus, of which exactly nine -- or 1% -- referred directly to these minorities.

Having presented these extraordinary findings, let me suggest one reason why the responses may have neglected ethnic minorities so egregiously. The HERI study of schools receiving Exxon Education Foundation money focussed on changes in management as a result of these grants, and many interview questions, especially those at the beginning of the interview, focussed specifically on the management of the respondent's college. Possibly interviewees who had already been asked several questions about management may have had a hard time intellectually shifting gears, so to speak, and may have given management-oriented responses even when asked general, open-ended questions.

And I should point out that ethnic minorities undoubtedly play a more important role on the campuses that were studied, and in the consciousness of the administrators interviewed, than is indicated above. In doing the content analysis, I relied on explicit references to ethnic studies programs, administrators, and professors, and if such were referred to obliquely they would not have been counted. Thus, for example, if one president said that a "highlight" had been increasing his college's library

collections, without specifically mentioning a collection in, say, black studies that he or she had in mind, that reference would not have been counted. Similarly, if in answer to the question, "Do you have certain associates whose opinions you particularly value?" a respondent had replied, "several professors in sociology, the department I used to teach in," without mentioning that one or more of them was heavily involved in teaching ethnic studies courses that reference, too, would have been missed.

Still and all, after allowing for some references not being counted because a respondent's answer was vague, general or ambiguous, the fact that five top administrative officers, in 909 separate responses to general, open-ended questions about their campus, explicitly referred to a minority group presence on their campus in only 1% of their answers, suggests that the top administrators of American colleges are not yet as aware of the problems and prospects of ethnic groups on their campuses as they should be.